

House Passes Walden-Baird Forest Emergency Recovery & Research Act - Bipartisan Legislation Now Heads to Senate - VIDEO: http://www.house.gov/baird/video/Rep.Baird_FERRA.wmv (May 17, 2006)

Washington, D.C. - In a bipartisan show of support for more responsible forest management policies, the U.S. House of Representatives today passed the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (HR 4200), a bill authored by Congressmen Greg Walden (R-OR) and Brian Baird (D-WA), by a vote of 243 to 182.

The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act will push for a faster federal response to disasters on federal forest land. The bill will give federal land managers the tools and resources they need to responsibly and promptly restore the health of federal forests following catastrophic events like wildfires, hurricanes, and floods. The legislation is now headed to the Senate for its consideration.

"The passage of this bill is a victory for responsible, common sense policy. The bottom line is, people use wood to build homes, to make paper and that wood needs to come from somewhere. We can use wood from trees that are dead or dying, or from trees that are alive and healthy. We can responsibly harvest wood here at home, abiding by environmental protections and creating jobs, or we can get our wood from clear cuts in equatorial rainforests where the environment is far more fragile and environmental protection and labor laws are far weaker or even nonexistent," Congressman Baird said.

"This legislation will enable us to utilize dead timber instead of letting it go to waste and to responsibly restore the health and diversity of our forests after a catastrophic event like a fire or hurricane," Baird added.

The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act was introduced in November after the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, chaired by Congressman Walden, held nine hearings on the subject. HR 4200 overwhelmingly passed both the House Resources Committee and House Agriculture Committee earlier this year with strong bipartisan support. The bill has nearly 150 House cosponsors, and has earned the support of a broad range of conservation, local government, and forestry organizations, including the 25,000-member National Federation of Federal Employees, 15,000-member Society of American Foresters, and a coalition representing more than 25,000 firefighting professionals.

"Our common sense, bipartisan legislation came to the House Floor after nine committee hearings across the country, more than fifty different drafts, and overwhelming support by both the House Resources and House Agriculture Committees," said Congressman Walden.

"Thousands upon thousands of foresters, scientists, firefighters, local government officials, and private landowners agree: federal forestland managers need the authorities provided by the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act for the future of America's national forests. The professionals who manage and protect our forests on a daily basis support this legislation because it allows them to use their expertise, hands-on experience and practical knowledge to make timely and responsible decisions necessary to improve the health, vitality and safety of our national forests," added Walden.

The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act:

§ Establishes new procedures to expedite rehabilitation and recovery efforts on federal land after catastrophic events like fire, hurricane, and flood;

§ Directs the Interior and Agriculture Departments to develop § with public and expert input - a pre-approved list of possible strategies to deal with damaged federal land in order to expedite response times;

§ Requires prompt evaluation of post-catastrophe land in order to fine-tune recovery plans and responsibly meet the unique, site-specific needs of each area;

§ Requires quick action, but does not shortchange environmental protections or public participation;

§ Specifically prohibits the harvest of green trees;

§ Allows only for the harvest of dead and dying trees in certain circumstance, if and only if it is deemed environmentally and economically responsible;

§ Specifically prohibits the construction of permanent roads and, for the first time in federal statute, stipulates that temporary roads must be removed;

§ Requires that any action must take into consideration habitat and watershed issues, be consistent with land management plans, and mitigate any environmental effects

§ Specifically prohibits plantation-style reforestation;

§ Applies the same standards for judicial and administrative review as the bipartisan Healthy Forests law, which requires courts to consider the short-term and long-term effects of taking, or not taking, the proposed action;

½ Requires an expedited National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedural review and mandate compliance with all environmental laws including the ESA, Wilderness Act, Clean Air Act, National Forest Management Act, Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, and others;

½ Allows federal agencies to assist local communities with projects to plant trees; market products from salvaged timber; and repair roads, bridges, or trails; and

½ Saves taxpayers \$23 million from 2007 to 2011 (CBO estimate).

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